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Deny MSU 'Fronted' for CIA in Vietnam

CPYRGHT

By ROBERT A. POPA
Of Our Lansing Bureau
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There is a cartoon pasted to a filing cabinet at Michigan State University showing two Arabs running for their lives down a street in an African village as they are chased by a herd of stampeding elephants.

The caption has one Arab saying to the other:
"You can just bet the CIA is behind this."

The CIA — the Central Intelligence Agency — has been blamed for many U.S. problems, most notably for engineering the disaster-ridden invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs.

ACCUSED IN BOOKLET

The cartoon is in the office of Wesley R. Fishel, professor of political science, in Berkeley Hall at MSU, and Fishel can feel a strong identification with the line, "You can just bet the CIA is behind this."

He and MSU are being accused, in a widely circulated booklet, of playing cloak and dagger games with the CIA in South Vietnam.

Fishel feels it's a bad rap, but he puts this in more academic terms, such as, "This attack on the university is odious."

Author of the attack is Robert Scheer, staff writer for Ramparts magazine in California. His booklet, "How the United States got involved in Vietnam," is a report to the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, a nonprofit group created by the Fund for the Republic.

Scheer estimated that 60,000 of the booklets are being circulated around the country, most of them free, although anyone wanting more than one copy must pay 75 cents a copy, less if large quantities are ordered.

In 1954, after Vietnam won its independence from France, the United States was interested in establishing a stable government favorable to the West.

MSU was asked to help in the development of the tiny nation in Southeast Asia. An "MSU project" team of experts went to Vietnam in 1954 to assist in developing programs in four areas — public administration, public information, police administration and economics.

DISPUTED BY HANNAH

Scheer said Vice - President Richard M. Nixon asked MSU President John A. Hannah to involve the university in the Vietnam project. Hannah, discharging, was in Vietnam primarily to provide "cover" behind which operatives of the United States might work secretly. He said the agents were like from the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), the U.S. operations mission and the CIA.

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"That cover remark is not true," said Hannah. "The booklet puts Fishel in a light he didn't deserve to be put in."

Fishel headed the MSU program in Vietnam in 1956. From 1954 until then he was an adviser to Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem. Fishel was probably the American closest to Diem at that time. Later, they had a falling out.

CALLED AN 'IN' MAN

The Times of Vietnam, in an editorial, called Fishel in 1963 "The most 'in' man among the foreigners." It said that many considered him more "in" than the "president's own ministers."

The editorial also charged the MSU group with "training and controlling the nations' hated secret police."

The Scheer booklet quotes the

the authenticity of its "exposure" of the MSU project.

But Fishel commented that the newspaper was controlled

by Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu, wife of Diem's brother. Fishel said she arranged the printing of the editorial when her position and that of her husband became precarious. She was trying to discredit MSU and relieve the blame for the secret police, who were controlled by her husband, Fishel said.

WRITER'S VERSION

Scheer said Fishel described his duty in Vietnam from 1954 to 1956 in this way:
"I was the only contact that he (special Ambassador Lawrence Collins) had with Diem that was at all effective for many months. After two years I surfaced—to use a CIA term—to become head of the MSU program."

Replied Fishel:
"I have never used a phrase like 'I surfaced' in my life. I never had any connection with the CIA. The author knifed me and I resent it. The booklet is a malicious job of special pleading."

"He started out to prove a point about which he had already made up his mind — if truth were lost in the process, so much the worse for truth."

Scheer retorted that his booklet might contain a "few errors in fact," but he said that all of them are "minor."

"I have no guilt feelings at all," he said. "I haven't written half of what went on over there and I don't think I'm unfair."

Not all officials at the center, which paid for the study, agree with Scheer's presentation, he admitted.

"But they felt this viewpoint should be published," he added.

POSITION VARIES

Although Fishel denies any MSU involvement with CIA, a less absolute position is taken by Prof. Ralph H. Smuckler, director of the MSU

grams. Smuckler directed the MSU Vietnam project in 1958 and 1959.

In the police administration portion of the project, some small amount of assistance was obtained from the U.S. government, Smuckler said, and a few of the borrowed helpers were from the CIA.

"But these were cloak and dagger operations," said Smuckler, "and the use of CIA agents was a drop in the bucket compared to the overall project."

USED 54 PROFESSORS

No help borrowed from the government was used after 1958, Smuckler said.

In all, the MSU project used 54 professors and 200 Vietnamese assistants. Only about a third of the professors in the project were from MSU.

One of these was Prof. Arthur E. Brandstatter, director of MSU's school of police administration. He went to Vietnam on four separate occasions between 1954 and 1960, putting in a total of about seven weeks.

Scheer said Brandstatter "began training Diem's palace guard," which he said was "supplied with guns and ammunition obtained from the U.S. Military Assistance Advisor Group."

Brandstatter commented:

'WAY OFF BASE'

"This man is way off base. I never trained any palace guard. All I did was write a report and hire a lot of people to go over. This is silly about the CIA."

While in Vietnam in 1954, Brandstatter said, a rumor circulated that enemies of Diem were trying to infiltrate the palace guard. Brandstatter said he spent "two or three hours" checking deployment of troops at the palace.

"We determined that the weapons were inadequate and that's all there was to it," he said.

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